

MATTIE CONDRA Y

From: Kathy Poulos-Minott [kpoulosm@maine.rr.com]
Sent: Monday, March 17, 2003 6:24 PM
To: MATTIE CONDRA Y
Subject: additional comments

Kathy Poulos-Minott
National LEP Advocacy Task Force
85 Lester Drive
Portland, Maine 04103

March 17, 2003

Dear Ms. Condray,

We are providing additional information to support the need for LSC to issue a guidance. (attached) as well as the following comments:

One of our Task Force members performed an *informal* test survey by telephone of 7 programs and 26 LSC-funded offices in different states, seeking to determine whether the programs were accessible by telephone and what information receptionists provided about the organization's capacity to effectively serve LEPs. To test the capacity of the offices to respond to a language assistance request, the surveyor selected *Somali* as a language.

While we acknowledge that making programs accessible is a process that takes time as well as money, the results of this survey were still very disturbing.

- All of telephone messaging systems would be impossible to navigate unless you speak English (or in some cases, Spanish, and in one case, an unidentified Asian language.)

In the cases where we reached a receptionist, the surveyor found that:

1. Two offices within one program *did* state that they were able to access interpretation services through a telephone interpreter service. Yet, another office in the same program had a long complicated message in English only.
2. With the exception of one office, all the other offices stated that they did not have a Somali staff member or ability to obtain an interpreter. (Our concern is that, absent on-staff resources, most programs appear to have no other system in place for ensuring access.)
3. When asked whether the office could at least provide a telephone-based interpreter, all of the other offices except one stated that they had no telephone interpreting services available. (Even the office that acknowledged the availability of a telephone based interpreting service encouraged the client to bring her own interpreter instead, stating that the phone interpreting service "takes forever.")
4. Some offices instead encouraged the client to bring a friend or family member.
5. When the surveyor asked *some* of the offices if the client should bring her own interpreter, *all* of

the offices that were asked responded that this was fine.

6. When the surveyor told some of the offices that the only person available to the client was her minor child, none of the offices discouraged the use of a child. One office stated that they have children interpreting for parents and grandparents all the time. Another office stated that it was fine for the client's 10 year old to interpret regarding an eviction.

The results of this informal survey clearly demonstrate the importance of LSC focusing attention on this issue and we thank you for doing so.

Sincerely,

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